

EXPORTING MANGOS TO EUROPE

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My company has a strange name, but in Europe I market as Hawaii Fruit Co., so they know what I am dealing with. I have been in the fruit export business since 1987, and I started shipping mangos in 1989. I work exclusively with the European market.

Mangos are a very small portion of my business. I wish that it could be more. The problem is mostly of supply. I ship ripe mangos. I cannot sell green mangos in Europe; if there is an ethnic market for them, I have not discovered it. The mangos I ship must be of very high quality, otherwise you cannot justify the high air freight to Europe. If they are of poor quality and you have to give credits, profits can go down quickly. My approach is that everything that goes must be nearly perfect. I have to be 100 percent satisfied that there are no bruised fruits and no disease. To ensure that, I only ship fully ripe mangos.

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Q: What is the freight to Europe?

A: It starts around \$1,900–2,000, sometimes a little less, for a container. I can pack a bit more than the 2,500 lb that Sam Hugh mentioned, which is about the industry standard. I have tried to find ways to get more in a container because of the high air freight.

Q: Do you ship to wholesalers?

A: They are not really wholesalers; they are importers. They are not necessarily large companies. I am working with a niche market, for a very high-priced commodity. Being from Hawaii, it is hard to compete with mangos exported to Europe from Africa, Israel, and Brazil, some of which is transported by ocean. My customers are mostly in Germany, although I have some in France, Italy, Great Britain, and Austria.

Q: Who is your principal market: restaurants, wholesalers?

A: It started off with high-end wholesalers in Germany who thought they had a few customers who would pay that much if the fruit is that good. They in turn sell to small, high-quality retail outlets, which died out in the 1960s and 1970s as

supermarkets took over but are coming back now. Large supermarkets are not interested in a high quality mango; they are interested in long shelf life and competitive price. If their mango costs \$1.99 or less, my mango cannot cost more; when the freight alone is \$3.00, there is no further discussion possible. When I make these remarks, I am speaking largely from my experience with papaya, really, because I have not shipped much mango. I think the example of papaya can be used with mango.

I do not think you can deal with chains without a very broad supply basis. Even if you can convince them to pay the high price, they can be very picky, demanding all one size; this week one container, next week three, the week after none. Mangos and papayas do not grow like that, and my workers want to be employed on a steady basis, and certainly the fruits do not all grow to size 9.

Q: Do you identify your product as being Hawaii-grown?

A: It helps in the initial introduction, because for many Europeans, Hawaii is the number one tourist destination. In the end, the fruit itself has to show its merits; the name will not be enough.

Q: Is there any interest in Europe for organically produced fruits?

A: I have asked some of my customers about this but have not pursued it in depth. The response from them was, "Well, how much do you have?" The answer is not much, so there is little sense in talking about it. There is also a prohibitive price difference. With the little that we have, it is probably not worth the effort, unless they know we can build it up. There is a growing market for organically grown foods, but I do not think it is as well developed in Europe as in the United States.

Q: What do you pay for mangos now?

A: If I can get first quality mangos, the limit at the moment is about 55 cents a pound, maybe 60. The quality has to be so good that I hardly have to sort anything out.

Q: What about off-season prices? Our local market pays well for off-season fruits.

A: It seems like when Hawaii 'Haden' mangos are available, that is the off season in Europe; there is less supply to their markets. So it fits nicely in that timeframe. Even if I could get mangos in the wintertime, I could not give much better prices because the competition is stiff in Europe at that time.

Q: When you say you are shipping ripe fruit, what do you mean?

A: I mean picked fully ripe from the tree; still firm but fully ripe. There can be a little bit of green left, but the fruit must be 75-100 percent fully ripe. The taste will be excellent. I can be assured that the fruit has not been bruised, as it might if fruits were injured when harvested green and then showed the bruise upon maturing. Most likely if there is disease, it would be showing by that stage. I ship the fruits chilled.

Q: How long does it take to get the fruit to the consumer?

A: Usually 24 hours freight time, and two to three days from the importers to the retail outlets; maybe three to five days overall.

Q: It has been mentioned that 'Haden' is not a good shipper; what have you found?

A: I have not had any quality problems, as long as I am sure of the quality when I ship them. We pack carefully and handle the boxes carefully.

Q: Who are your suppliers?

A: Backyard producers. I put an ad in the paper, and they come to me. I am always looking for suppliers.

Q: Do you get any complaints of spoilage at the other end?

A: Not really. When I started out I had a shipment of papayas that was a loss; I determined that would never happen again, and took measures to ensure that, such as the ripeness factor I mentioned. For mangos, I have had no complaints, but we check every fruit carefully, and if there is any suspicion of disease, we discard it.

Q: I have observed that 'Haden' is fully delicious with a fair amount of green still on it, and if you pick them too late they get that jelly-seed problem where they get soft around the seed. Also, fruits that are fully ripe are more bruisable than when they are still a little green. I prefer to get them just before fully ripe so I can let them ripen on the table and choose just the right time to eat them.

A: We have had no problems with fully ripe fruits. We chill them as soon as possible. I buy only 'Haden' now because my experience with them has been very positive, but I am willing to be educated about other varieties.

Q: Do you wrap or trade-pack your fruits?

A: No, I just place them in a 10-lb box, separated with a cushion to protect them and make the box look a little nicer.